

Message to the Congress on Environmental Policy April 6, 1995

To the Congress of the United States:

The United States has always been blessed with an abundance of natural resources. Together with the ingenuity and determination of the American people, these resources have formed the basis of our prosperity. They have given us the opportunity to feed our people, power our industry, create our medicines, and defend our borders—and we have a responsibility to be good stewards of our heritage. In recent decades, however, rapid technological advances and population growth have greatly enhanced our ability to have an impact on our surroundings—and we do not always pause to contemplate the consequences of our actions. Far too often, our short-sighted decisions cause the greatest harm to the very people who are least able to influence them—future generations.

We have a moral obligation to represent the interests of those who have no voice in today's decisions—our children and grandchildren. We have a responsibility to see that they inherit a productive and livable world that allows their families to enjoy the same or greater opportunities than we ourselves have enjoyed. Those of us who still believe in the American Dream will settle for no less. Those who say that we cannot afford both a strong economy and a healthy environment are ignoring the fact that the two are inextricably linked. Our economy will not remain strong for long if we continue to consume renewable resources faster than they can be replenished, or nonrenewable resources faster than we can develop substitutes; America's fishing and timber-dependent communities will not survive for long if we destroy our fisheries and our forests. Whether the subject is deficit spending or the stewardship of our fisheries, the issue is the same: we should not pursue a strategy of short-term gain that will harm future generations.

Senators Henry Jackson and Ed Muskie, and Congressman John Dingell understood this back in 1969 when they joined together to work for passage of the National Environmental Policy Act. At its heart, the National Environmental Policy Act is about our relationship with the natural world, and about our relationship with future generations. For the first time, the Na-

tional Environmental Policy Act made explicit the widely-held public sentiment that we should live in harmony with nature and make decisions that account for future generations as well as for today. It declared that the Federal Government should work in concert with State and local governments and the citizens of this great Nation "to create and maintain conditions under which man and nature can exist in productive harmony, and fulfill the social, economic, and other requirements of present and future generations of Americans."

Over the past 25 years, America has made great progress in protecting the environment. The air is cleaner in many places than it was, and we no longer have rivers that catch on fire. And yet, this year in Milwaukee, more than 100 people died from drinking contaminated water, and many of our surface waters are still not fit for fishing and swimming. One in four Americans still lives near a toxic dump and almost as many breathe air that is unhealthy.

In order to continue the progress that we have made and adequately provide for future generations, my Administration is ushering in a new era of common sense reforms. We are bringing together Americans from all walks of life to find new solutions to protect our health, improve our Nation's stewardship of natural resources, and provide lasting economic opportunities for ourselves and for our children. We are reinventing environmental programs to make them work better and cost less.

My Administration is ushering in a new era of environmental reforms in many ways. Following is a description of a few of these reforms, grouped into three clusters: first, stronger and smarter health protection programs such as my proposed Superfund reforms and EPA's new common sense approach to regulation; second, new approaches to resource management, such as our Northwest forest plan, that provide better stewardship of our natural resources and sustained economic opportunity; and third, the promotion of innovative environmental technologies, for healthier air and water as well as stronger economic growth now and in the future.

Stronger and Smarter Health Protection Programs. Throughout my Administration, we have

been refining Government, striving to make it work better and cost less. One of the best places to apply this principle in the environmental arena is the Superfund program. For far too long, far too many Superfund dollars have been spent on lawyers and not nearly enough have been spent on clean-up. I've directed my Administration to reform this program by cutting legal costs, increasing community involvement, and cleaning up toxic dumps more quickly. The reformed Superfund program will be faster, fairer, and more efficient—and it will put more land back into productive community use.

Similarly, EPA is embarking on a new strategy to make environmental and health regulation work better and cost less. This new common sense approach has the potential to revolutionize the way we write environmental regulations. First, EPA will not seek to adopt environmental standards in a vacuum. Instead, all the affected stakeholders—representatives of industry, labor, State governments, and the environmental community—will be involved from the beginning. Second, we will replace one-size-fits-all regulations with a focus on results achieved with flexible means. And at last, we're taking a consistent, comprehensive approach. With the old piecemeal approach, the water rules were written in isolation of the air rules and the waste rules, and too often led to results that merely shuffled and shifted pollutants—results that had too little health protection at too great a cost. With its new common sense approach, EPA will address the full range of environmental and health impacts of a given industry—steel or electronics for example—to get cleaner, faster, and cheaper results.

Better Stewardship of our Natural Resources. Just as representative of our new approach to the environment—and just as grounded in common sense—is the Administration's commitment to ecosystems management of the Nation's natural resources. For decades ecologists have known that what we do with one resource affects the others. For instance, the way we manage a forest has very real consequences for the quality of the rivers that run through the forest, very real consequences for the fishermen who depend on that water for their livelihood, and very real consequences for the health of the community downstream. But until recently, government operations failed to account adequately for such interaction. In many cases, several Federal agencies operated independently in the

same area under different rules. In many cases, no one paused to ponder the negative consequences of their actions until it was too late.

Often, these consequences were catastrophic, leading to ecological and economic train wrecks such as the collapse of fisheries along the coasts, or the conflict over timber cutting in the Pacific Northwest. When I convened the Forest Conference earlier this year I saw the devastating effects of the Federal Government's lack of foresight and failure to provide leadership. Here, perhaps more than anywhere else, is a case study in how a failure to anticipate the consequences of our actions on the natural environment can be devastating to our livelihoods in the years ahead. Our forest plan is a balanced and comprehensive program to put people back to work and protect ancient forests for future generations. It will not solve all of the region's problems but it is a strong first step at restoring both the long-term health of the region's ecosystem and the region's economy.

Innovative Environmental Technologies. Environmental and health reforms such as EPA's common sense strategy and natural resource reforms such as the forest plan provide an opportunity, and an obligation, to make good decisions for today that continue to pay off for generations to come. In much the same way, sound investments in environmental technology can ensure that we leave to future generations a productive, livable world. Every innovation in environmental technology opens up a new expanse of economic and environmental possibilities, making it possible to accomplish goals that have eluded us in the past. From the very beginning, I have promoted innovative environmental technologies as a top priority. We've launched a series of environmental technology initiatives, issued a number of Executive orders to help spur the application of these technologies, and taken concrete steps to promote their export. Experts say the world market for environmental technology is nearly \$300 billion today and that it may double by the year 2000. Every dollar we invest in environmental technology will pay off in a healthier environment worldwide, in greater market share for U.S. companies, and in more jobs for American workers.

Innovations in environmental technology can be the bridge that carries us from the threat of greater health crises and ecological destruction toward the promise of greater economic prosperity and social well-being. Innovation by

innovation, we can build a world transformed by human ingenuity and creativity—a world in which economic activity and the natural environment support and sustain one another.

This is the vision that Jackson, Muskie, and Dingell articulated more than two decades ago when they wrote in the National Environmental Policy Act that we should strive to live in productive harmony with nature and seek to fulfill the social and economic needs of future generations. We share a common responsibility to see beyond the urgent pressures of today and think of the future. We share a common responsibility

to speak for our children, so that they inherit a world filled with the same opportunity that we had. This is the vision for which we work today and the guiding principle behind my Administration's environmental policies.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

The White House,
April 6, 1995.

NOTE: This message was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on April 7.

Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session With the American Society of Newspaper Editors in Dallas, Texas April 7, 1995

The President. Thank you very much. Thank you. "Fishbait" Favre. It's got kind of a nice ring, doesn't it? [*Laughter*] I knew he was born in New Orleans before he ever said it. I love to listen to people from New Orleans talk.

I thank you for that kind introduction. Your convention program chair, Bob Haiman, and your incoming president, Bill Ketter, ladies and gentlemen, I'm very glad to be here.

I thought that in addition to me you were going to hear from three people who had run, are running, and were about to run for President. But only Bill Weld showed up. I hope he stays in the "about to run." He and Steve Merrill are very impressive men, and I'm glad that they came here and gave the Republican point of view.

It's a privilege to be here. I'd like to begin by saying that I am very proud, and I know you are, for the work that the Inter American Press Association has done in its Declaration of Chapultepec. I know that you and the Newspaper Association of America have worked tirelessly for press freedoms all throughout the Americas. And just before I came out here I was proud to sign a Charter of Endorsement for the Declaration of Chapultepec. And I thank you for giving me that opportunity and for what you have done to advance the cause of a free press.

I was talking to a friend of mine the other day who said, "Well, in the '94 election we

discovered the limits of liberalism, and now we're about to discover the limits of conservatism." And it put me in mind of a story I once heard about the—and actually, I thought about it because I met Mr. Favre—about the late Huey Long, who, when he was Governor and he was preaching his share-the-wealth plan, was out in the country one day at a little country crossroads. And he had all the people gathered up. And he was going on about how the people were being plundered by the organized wealthy interests in Louisiana.

And he saw a guy out in the crowd that he knew and he said, "Brother Jones, if you had three Cadillacs, wouldn't you give up one of them so we could gather up the kids and take them to school during the week and take them to church on the weekend?" He said, "Sure, I would." He said, "And if you had \$3 million, wouldn't you give up just a million of it so we could put a roof over everybody's head and make sure everybody had food to eat?" He said, "Well, of course I would." He said, "And if you had three hogs—" He said, "Wait a minute, Governor, I've got three hogs." [*Laughter*]

Anyway, that's the limits of liberalism. Now we're about to discover the limits of conservatism.

Ladies and gentlemen, we are at a historic moment in our country's history: on the verge of a new century, living in a very different kind